

# TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE

## Edward King, *Science Fiction and Digital Technologies in Argentine and Brazilian Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan 2013)\*

Edward King's *Science Fiction and Digital Technologies in Argentine and Brazilian Culture* joins the ever-growing tide of English language Science Fiction Studies focusing on Latin American publications. (Within the Spanish speaking world and internationally Science Fiction Studies has for the past few decades established itself as a relevant field of academic inquiry through numerous symposiums, journals and publishing houses specialising in both Science Fiction proper and studies of the genre). *Science Fiction and Digital Technologies in Argentine and Brazilian Culture* is an ambitious book that engages with, theorises and makes visible the changing political and ideological landscapes of Brazil and Argentina under neoliberalism. King's book achieves this by engaging with the science fiction literature produced in those countries since the *zero point* of their respective dictatorships and highlights how that very brutal shift toward the neoliberal social model is reflected and challenged in works from this genre. The book is comprised of an introduction, six chapters that analyse a series of texts (novels, a trilogy of novels and in the final chapter, a graphic-novel series) and a conclusion.

*Science Fiction and Digital Technologies in Argentine and Brazilian Culture* opens with a strong introductory chapter which discusses the prevalence of technological imagery (specifically implants and transmitters) in recent cultural texts from both Argentina and Brazil, before stating King's main thesis: that due to the dictatorial experience and the imposition of neoliberalism from above, both Argentina and Brazil have been the ground zero of the global shift from the 'Disciplinary Society' (Foucault) of the traditional nation state of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to the 'Society of Control' (Deleuze) of the era of globalisation. King further proposes that the Science Fiction produced in these societies plays out and makes apparent many of the social anxieties and changes in subjectivity engendered during this transition. For King, Argentina and Brazil's Science Fiction *corpus* must be read in this post-dictatorial context, as through its critical (parodic, ex-centric) use of classic genre tropes, it challenges new and old attitudes and conceptions about race, class, gender, memory, the state and national identity in Brazil and Argentina. In this way, King introduces the book's underlying conceptual framework as one that engages with the interfaces of philosophy and cultural theory, developing in particular the concept of 'affect' as discussed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, whilst simultaneously contextualising this critical framework by way of a discussion of the recent history of Brazil and Argentina. King also situates contemporary Argentine and Brazilian science fiction in a historical context, mentioning the Latin American classics of the genre, as well as discussing the key texts of the science fiction canon from the perspective of the present day Latin American reader. (King mentions in particular the work of William Burroughs, Philip K. Dick, Thomas Pynchon and William Gibson as key influences for the science fiction being produced in Latin America, especially in the context of post-dictatorial countries like Argentina and Brazil).

Where the book's introduction produces a convincing and original argument in a transversal approach (cultural theory, genre studies, history of literature), the following chapters of the book set out to test these ideas against King's secondary thesis, that the Science Fiction produced in Brazil and Argentina makes possible a mapping of the breakdown of the social subject as the subject's experience in society is reconfigured from that of operating within the confines of a 'Disciplinary Society' (a pre-globalisation nation-state) to engaging with and enacting the values and symbols of the present-day 'Society of Control'.

Book reviews: *Science Fiction and Digital Technologies in Argentine and Brazilian Culture* by Edward King. Israel Holas Allimant.

*Transnational Literature* Vol. 9 no. 1, November 2016.

<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

The first chapter, '*Espiritismo Digital in Cyberfiction from Brazil*', critically engages with representations of disembodiment in Brazilian science fiction (specifically in Tupinipunk works by Alfredo Sirkis and Fausto Fawcett, *Santa Clara Poltergeist* and *Silicone XXI*) by juxtaposing the popularity of *Espiritismo* (Spiritism) in nineteenth-century Brazil, against the cultural values made possible by late twentieth- and twenty-first-century technologies in Brazil through the novel *Santa Clara Poltergeist*. In the first case, King proposes that *espiritista* disembodiment provides an escape valve for nineteenth century anxieties with regard to the hegemony of the positivist ideology as the discourse of the nation-state, whereas in the second case, disembodiment through technological means presents the reader with the chance to confront head-on the 'affective dynamics that drive high tech consumer culture' (62), best represented by the parodic use of the *cyberpunk* genre trope of body transcendence. In King's reading of *Santa Clara Poltergeist* and *Silicone XXI*, the use of this trope remains ambiguous: it at the same time celebrates and problematizes the values of late-capitalism.

The second chapter 'Race and the Digital Body' continues with the analysis of the novels of Sirkis and Fawcett, this time focusing on how *Santa Clara Poltergeist*, *Silicone XXI* and *Básico Instinto* call into question racialized ideas of national identity established during the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the Science Fiction tropes of *otherness* and through representations of race as modulated by the possibilities of the *digital body* as part of a global image culture delineated through flows of affect. For King, the texts analysed enable a digital-parodic return/reading of the 19<sup>th</sup> century romantic myths of the nation states of Argentina and Brazil and in such a way they 'highlight the fact that there is a continuity between the exclusions that were constitutive of the national social body [...] and the flexible body of the global market' (205).

The third chapter '*Cruz Diablo: Cyberspace as Frontier*' frames the novel *Cruz Diablo* in the context of the return to the myth of the romantic imagination with regard to its portrayal of cyberspace as frontier and simultaneously explores the adoption of neoliberal ideology in Latin America as a form of neo-coloniality, whilst also foregrounding the possibility for modulation, that is, for 'unprogrammed and potentially progressive side effects' (124).

The fourth chapter 'Distributed agency in Marcelo Cohen's *Casa de Ottro*' explores, through King's reading of the novel in question, representations of Cyberspace as both a map of 'how power functions in neoliberalism as well as a blueprint for how to begin to negotiate it' (King, 152).

The fifth chapter and sixth chapters, 'Memory and Affective Technologies in the Argentine Comic Book Series *Cybersix*' and 'Prosthetic Memory and the Disruption of the Affective Control in the Graphic Fiction of Lourenço Mutarelli', explore ideas about the construction and representation of memory in graphic novels, highlighting especially the disruptive possibilities of the genre as a response to the 'affect-saturated image world' (178) that is the 'emerging paradigm of power of the neoliberal era' (202).

King's conclusion is brief and reiterates the rhizomic concepts explored in the previous chapters through textual analysis, reiterating the creative act in Argentina and Brazilian Science Fiction as a subversive attempt to use genre tropes, or 'the potential of the market' (207), as an attempt to 'free the positive potential of capitalism – the capacity for life to create ever-new connections and potentials – from its regressive or archaic tendencies to reduce those connections to one axiomatic of production' (207) and in this way reject and make problematic the 'narrative of technological progress and development' (207) that is the myth of neoliberalism.

King's *Science Fiction and Digital Technologies in Argentine and Brazilian Culture* is an important book that shines an interesting light on hitherto unexplored elements of now classic texts of Latin American fiction and a key reading for researchers interested in the contestatory, critical

nature of Latin American science fiction and in exploring how this body of work interacts with critical theory and questions the hegemonic values of contemporary Latin America.

**Israel Holas Allimant**  
Deakin University

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\* This review was originally submitted to *Critical Race and Whiteness Studies Journal*.